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A FLEET IN BEING

NOTES OF TWO TRIPS WITH THE CHANNEL SQUADRON

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BY

RUDYARD KIPLING

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A FLEET IN BEING

CHAPTER I

'. . . . the sailor men
That sail upon the seas,
To fight the Wars and keep the Laws,
And live on yellow peas.'

'A Gunroom Ditty-Box.' G. S. Bowles.

Some thirty of her Majesty's men-of-war were involved in this matter; say a dozen battleships of the most recent, and seventeen or eighteen cruisers; but my concern was limited to one of a new type commanded by an old friend. I had some dim knowledge of the interior of a warship, but none of the new world into which I stepped from a Portsmouth wherry one wonderful summer evening in '97.

With the exception of the Captain, the Chief Engineer, and maybe a few petty officers, nobody was more than twenty-eight years old. They ranged in the ward-room from this resourceful age to twenty-six or seven clear-cut, clean-shaved young faces with all

manner of varied experience behind them. When one comes to think, it is only just that a light 20-knot cruiser should be handled, under guidance of an older head, by affable young gentlemen prepared, even sinfully delighted, to take chances not set down in books. She was new, they were new, the Admiral was new, and we were all off to the Manœuvres together—thirty keels next day threading their way in and out between a hundred and twenty moored vessels not so fortunate. We opened the ball, for the benefit of some foreign warships, with a piece of rather pretty steering. A consort was coming up a waterlane, between two lines of shipping, just behind us; and we nipped in immediately ahead of her, precisely as a hansom turning out of Bond Street nips in in front of a City 'bus. Distance on water is deceptive, and when I vowed that at one crisis I could have spat on the wicked ram of our next astern, pointed straight at our naked turning side, the ward-room laughed.

'Oh, that's nothing,' said a gentleman of twenty-two. 'Wait till we have to keep station to-night. It's my middle watch.'

'Close water-tight doors, then,' said a Sub-Lieutenant. 'I say' (this to the passenger) 'if you find a second-class cruiser's ram in the small of your back at midnight don't be alarmed.'

FASCINATING GAME OF GENERAL POST

We were then strung out in a six-mile line, thirty ships, all heading Westwards. As soon as we found room the Flagship began to signal, and there followed

a most fascinating game of general post. When I came to know our signalmen on the human side I appreciated it even more. The Admiral wreathed himself with flags, strings of them ; the signalman on our high little, narrow little bridge, telescope jammed to his eye, read out the letters of that order ; the Quartermaster spun the infantine wheel ; the Officer of the Bridge rumbled requests down the speaking-tube to the engine-room, and away we fled to take up station at such and such a distance from our neighbours, ahead and astern, at such and such an angle on the Admiral, his bow or beam. The end of it was a miracle to lay eyes. The long line became four parallel lines of strength and beauty, a mile and a quarter from flank to flank, and thus we abode till evening. Two hundred yards or so behind us the ram of our next astern planed through the still water ; an equal distance in front of us lay the oily water from the screw of our next ahead. So it was ordered, and so we did, as though glued into position. But our Captain took up the parable and bade me observe how slack we were, by reason of recent festivities, compared to what we should be in a few days. 'Now we're all over the shop. The ships haven't worked together, and station-keeping isn't as easy as it looks.' Later on I found this was perfectly true.

A VARYING STRAIN

One thing more than all the rest impresses the passenger on a Queen's ship. She is seldom for three whole hours at the same speed. The liner clear

of her dock strikes her pace and holds it to her journey's end, but the man-of-war must always have two or three knots up her sleeve in case the Admiral demands a spurt; she must also be ready to drop three or four knots at the wave of a flag; and on occasion she must lie still and meditate. This means a varying strain on all the mechanism, and constant strain on the people who control it.

I counted seven speeds in one watch, ranging from eight knots to seventeen, which, with eleven, was our point of maximum vibration. At eight knots you heard the vicious little twin-screws jigitting like restive horses; at seventeen they pegged away into the sea like a pair of short-gaited trotting ponies on a hard road. But one felt, even in dreams, that she was being held back. Those who talk of a liner's freedom from breakdown should take a 7,000 horse-power boat and hit her and hold her for a fortnight all across the salt seas.

IN CLUB AND COTERIES

After a while I went to the galley to get light on these and other matters. Once forward of the deck torpedo-tubes you enter another and a fascinating world of seamen-gunners, artificers, cooks, Marines (we had twenty and a sergeant), ship's boys, signal-men, and the general democracy. Here the men smoke at the permitted times, and in clubs and coteries gossip and say what they please of each other and their superiors. Their speech is soft (if every-one spoke aloud you could not hear yourself think on a cruiser), their gestures are few (if a man swung

his arms about he would interfere with his neighbour), their steps are noiseless as they pop in and out of the forward flats; they are at all times immensely interesting, and, as a rule, delightfully amusing. Their slang borrows from the engine-room, the working parts of guns, the drill-book, and the last music-hall song. It is delivered in a tight-lipped undertone; the more excruciatingly funny parts without a shade of expression. The first thing that strikes a casual observer is their superb health; next, their quiet adequateness; and thirdly, a grave courtesy. But under the shell of the new Navy beats the heart of the old. All Marryat's immortals are there, better fed, better tended, better educated, but at heart unchanged. I heard Swinburne laying down the law to his juniors by the ash-shoot; Chucks was there, too, inquiring in the politest manner in the world what a friend meant by spreading his limbs about the landscape; and a lineal descendant of Dispart fussed over a 4in. gun that some one had been rude to. They were men of the world, at once curiously simple and curiously wily (this makes the charm of the Naval man of all ranks), coming and going about their businesses like shadows.

NOT FROM THE ADMIRALTY STANDPOINT

They were all keenly interested in the Manœuvres —not from the Admiralty standpoint, but the personal. Many of them had served under one or other of the Admirals, and they enlightened their fellows, as you shall later hear.

Then night fell, and our Fleet blazed 'like a lot of chemists' shops adrift,' as one truthfully put it—six lights to each ship; bewildering the tramps. There was a cove of refuge, by one of the forward 4-in. guns, within touch of the traffic to the bridge, the break of the foc'sle, the crowded populations below, and the light banter near the galley. My vigil here was cheered by the society of a Marine, who delivered a lecture on the thickness of the skulls of the inhabitants of South America, as tested by his own hands. It ended thus: 'An' so I got ten days in one o' their stinkin' prisons. Fed me on grapes they did, along with one o' their own murderers. Funny people them South Americans. Oh, *we* 'adn't killed any one. We only skirmished through their bloomin' Suburbs lookin' for fun like.'

'Fun! *We*'ve got all the fun we want!' growled a voice in the shadow. A stoker had risen silently as a seal for a breath of air, and stood, chest to the breeze, scanning the Fleet lights.

''Ullo! Wot's the matter with *your* condenser?' said the Marine. 'You'd better take your mucky 'ands off them hammick-cloths or you'll be spoke to.'

'Our bunkers,' said the figure, addressing his grievance to the sea-line, 'are stuck all about like a lot o' women's pockets. They're stuck about like a lot o' bunion-plasters. That's what our bunkers are.' He slipped back into the darkness. Presently a signalman pattered by to relieve his mate on the bridge.

'You'll be 'ung,' said the Marine, who was a wit, and by the same token something of a prophet.

'Not if you're anywhere in the crowd I won't,' was the retort, always in a cautious, 'don't-wake-him' undertone. 'Wot are you doin' 'ere?'

'Never you mind. You go on up to the 'igh an' lofty bridge an' persecute your vocation. My Gawd! I wouldn't be a signalman, not for ever so.'

When I met my friend next morning 'persecuting his vocation' as sentry over the lifebuoy aft neither he nor I recognised each other; but I owe him some very nice tales.

WHEELING, CIRCLING, AND RETURNING

Next day both Fleets were exercised at steam tactics, which is a noble game; but I was too interested in the life of my own cruiser, unfolding hour by hour, to be intelligently interested in evolutions. All I remember is that we were eternally taking up positions at fifteen knots an hour amid a crowd of other cruisers, all precisely alike, all still as death, each with a wedge of white foam under her nose; wheeling, circling, and returning. The battleships danced stately quadrilles by themselves in another part of the deep. We of the light horse did barn-dances about the windy floors; and precisely as couples in the ball-room fling a word over their shoulders, so we and our friends, whirling past to take up fresh stations, snapped out an unofficial sentence or two by means of our bridge-semaphores. Cruisers are wondrous human. In the afternoon the battleships overtook us, their white upperworks showing like icebergs as they topped the sea-line. Then we sobered our faces, and the engineers had

rest, and at a wave of the Admiral's flag off Land's End our Fleet was split in twain. One half would go outside Ireland, toying with the weight of the Atlantic *en route*, to Blacksod Bay, while we turned up the Irish Channel to Lough Swilly. There we would coal, and wait for War. After that it would be blind man's buff within a three hundred and fifty mile ring of the Atlantic. We of Lough Swilly would try to catch the Blacksod Fleet, which was supposed to have a rendezvous of its own somewhere out at sea, before it could return to the shelter of the Bay.

THE EXPERTS OF THE LOWER DECK

There was, however, one small flaw in the rules, and as soon as they were in possession of the plan of campaign the experts of the lower deck put their horny thumbs on it—thus :

'Look 'ere. Their Admiral 'as to go out from Blacksod to some rendezvous known only to 'isself. Ain't that so?'

'We've 'eard all that.' This from an impertinent, new to War.

'Leavin' a cruiser be'ind 'im—*Blake* most likely, or *Blenheim*—to bring 'im word of the outbreak of 'ostilities. Ain't that so?'

'Get *on*. What are you drivin' at?'

'You'll see. When that cruiser overtakes 'im 'e 'as to navigate back to Blacksod from 'is precious rendezvous to get 'ome again before we intercepts the beggar.'

'Well?'

'Now I put it to you. What's to prevent 'im rendezvousin' out *slow* in order to be overtook by that cruiser ; an' rendezvousin' back quick to Blacksod, before we intercepts 'im? I don't see that '*is* steamin' rate is anywhere laid down. You mark my word, 'e'll take precious good care to be overtook by that cruiser of 'is. We won't catch 'im. There's an 'ole in the rules an' 'e'll slip through. *I* know 'im if you don't!'

The voice went on to describe 'im,' the Admiral of our enemy—as a wily person, who would make the Admiralty sit up.

And truly, it came out in the end that the other Admiral had done almost exactly what his foc'sle friends expected. He went to his rendezvous slowly, was overtaken by his cruiser about a hundred miles from the rendezvous, turned back again to Blacksod, and having won the game of 'Pussy wants a corner,' played about in front of the Bay till we descended on him. Then he was affable, as he could afford to be, explained the situation, and I presume smiled. There was a 'hole in the rules,' and he sailed all his Fleet through it.

We, of the Northern Squadron, found Lough Swilly in full possession of a Sou'-west gale, and an assortment of dingy colliers lying where they could most annoy the anchoring Fleet. A collier came alongside with donkey-engines that would not lift more than half their proper load ; she had no bags, no shovels, and her crazy derrick-boom could not be topped up enough to let the load clear our bulwarks. So we supplied our own bags and shovels, rearranged the boom, put two of our own men on the rickety

donkey-engines, and fell to work in that howling wind and wet.

COALING: A PREPARATION FOR WAR

As a preparation for War next day, it seemed a little hard on the crew, who worked like sailors—there is no stronger term. From time to time a red-eyed black demon, with flashing teeth, shot into the ward-room for a bite and a drink, cried out the number of tons aboard, added a few pious words on the collier's appliances, and our bunkers ('Like a lot of bunion-plasters,' the stoker had said), and tore back to where the donkey-engines wheezed, the bags crashed, the shovels rasped and scraped, the boom whined and creaked, and the First Lieutenant, carved in pure jet, said precisely what occurred to him. Before the collier cast off a full-blooded battleship sent over a boat to take some measurements of her hatch. The boat was in charge of a Midshipman aged, perhaps, seventeen, though he looked younger. He came dripping into the ward-room—bloodless, with livid lips, for he had been invalided from the Mediterranean full of Malta fever.

'And what are you in?' said our Captain, who chanced to pass by.

'The *Victorious*, sir, and a smart ship!' He drank his little glass of Marsala, swirled his dank boat-cloak about him, and went out serenely to take his boat home through the dark and the dismal welter.

Now the *Victorious*, she is some fourteen thousand nine hundred tons, and he who gave her her certificate

was maybe ten stone two—with a touch of Malta fever on him !

THE WARD-ROOM DISPORTED ITSELF

We cleaned up at last ; the First Lieutenant's face relaxed a little, and some one called for the instruments of music. Out came two violins, a mandoline, and bagpipes, and the ward-room disported itself among tunes of three Nations till War should be declared. In the middle of a scientific experiment as to how the ship's kitten might be affected by bagpipes that hour struck, and even more swiftly than pussy fled under the sofa the trim mess-jackets melted away, the chaff ceased, the hull shivered to the power of the steam-capstan, the slapping of the water on our sides grew, and we glided through the moored Fleet to the mouth of Lough Swilly. Our orders were to follow and support another cruiser who had been already despatched towards Blacksod Bay to observe the enemy—or rather that cruiser who was bearing news of the outbreak of War to the enemy's Fleet.

It was then midnight of the 7th of July—by the rules of the game the main body could not move till noon of the 8th—and the North Atlantic, cold and lumpy, was waiting for us as soon as we had put out our lights. Then I began to understand why a certain type of cruiser is irreverently styled 'a commodious coffee-grinder.' We had the length of a smallish liner, but by no means her dead weight, so where the Red Duster would have driven heavily through the seas the White Ensign danced ; and the twin-screws gave us more kick than was

pleasant. At half-past five of a peculiarly cheerless dawn we picked up the big cruiser (who had seen nothing), stayed in her company till nearly seven, and ran back to rejoin the Fleet, whom we met coming out of Lough Swilly about 1 p.m. of Thursday, the 8th. And the weather was vile. Once again we headed W.N.W. in company at an average speed of between thirteen and fourteen knots on a straightaway run of three hundred and fifty miles towards the Rockal Bank and the lonely rock that rises out of the sea there. The idea was that our enemy might have made this his rendezvous, in which case we had hope of catching him *en masse.*

Through that penitential day the little cruiser was disgustingly lively, but all we took aboard was spray, whereas the low-bowed battleships slugged their bluff noses into the surge and rose dripping like half-tide rocks. The Flagship might have manœuvred like half a dozen Nelsons, but I lay immediately above the twin-screws and thought of the Quartermaster on the reeling bridge who was not allowed to lie down. Through the cabin-door I could see the decks, dim with spray; hear the bugles calling to quarters; and catch glimpses of the uninterrupted life of the ship—a shining face under a sou'wester; a pair of sea-legs cloaked in oil-skins; a hurrying signalman with a rolling and an anxious eye; a warrant officer concerned for the proper housing of his quick-firers, as they disappeared in squirts of foam; or a Lieutenant serenely reporting men and things 'present' or 'correct.' Behind all, as the cruiser flung herself carelessly abroad, great grey and slate-coloured scoops of tormented sea. About midnight

the scouting cruiser—same we had left that morning on the look-out for the *Blake* or the *Blenheim*—rejoined the Fleet; but the Fleet might have gone down as one keel so far as one unhappy traveller was concerned.

By noon of July 9 we had covered 325½ miles in twenty-four hours, with never a sight of the enemy to cheer us, and had reached the limit of our ground. Here we turned, and, on a front of twenty-four miles from wing to wing, swept down 250 miles South-eastward to the offing of Blacksod Bay.

'MISSED!'

Mercifully the weather began to improve, and we had the sea more or less behind us. It was when we entered on this second slant, about three minutes after the Fleet swung round, that, as though all men had thought it together, a word went round our forecastle—'Missed!' After dinner, as they were smoking above the spit-kids, the doctrine was amplified with suitable language by the foc'sle experts, and it was explained to me with a great certainty how the other side had out-manœuvred us 'by means of the 'ole in the rules.' In other words, 'he had been overtook by 'is cruiser,' precisely as the wiser heads had prophesied; and even at that early stage of the game we had been sold.

There was no way of finding out anything for sure. A big scouting cruiser slipped off again a little before dawn of the 10th, and six or seven hours later was reported to be in sight with news of the enemy. At this point there came, as we learned

later, what you might call a hitch. Some unhappy signalman, they assert, misplaced a flag of a signal whereby it was caused to be believed that a cruiser had sighted the enemy where there was no enemy. In that direction, then, the Fleet gave chase, and though the thing was abortive, the run was a beautiful example of what the new Navy can do at a pinch.

WE DISCOVERED OUR MISTAKE

Then, I suppose, we discovered our mistake about the enemy, and hurried all together for Blacksod Bay in the hope of cutting him off. Arrived at the scattered Islands near the mouth, a cruiser was sent inside to see if any one was at home, while the Flagship bade the rest of us 'walk foreninst her while she considered on it.' Meteorologically the weather was now glorious—a blazing sun, and a light swell to which the cruisers rolled lazily, as hounds roll on the grass at a check. Nautically there was a good deal of thunder in the air. Everybody knew something had gone wrong, and when the Flagship announced that she was not at all pleased with the signalling throughout the Fleet it was no more than every one expected.

Now the Flagship had some fifty or sixty signalmen, and a bridge as broad as a houseboat and as clear as a ball-room. Our bridge was perhaps four feet broad; the roar of a stoke-hold ventilating-fan, placed apparently for that purpose, carefully sucked up two-thirds of every shouted order; and between the bridge and the poop the luckless signalman, for

want of an overhead passage, had to run an obstacle race along the crowded decks. We owned six signalmen. After watching them for a week I was prepared to swear that each had six arms and eight cinder-proof eyes; but the Flagship thought otherwise. I heard what the signalmen thought later on; but that was by no means for publication.

HIGH-SPEED SCOUTING

Back came the cruiser with news that Blacksod Bay was empty. Meantime three other boats had been sent off to reinforce the racing cruiser whose constant business it was to keep touch with the enemy. That monster did most of our high-speed scouting, and several times at least saw something of the other side. We were not so lucky. With three second-class friends we were ordered to patrol at twelve knots an hour on a six mile beat thirteen miles to the North-east of Eagle Island, to fire a rocket if we saw anything of the enemy that night, and to stay out till we were recalled. When we reached our ground the sea was all empty save for one speck on the horizon that marked the next cruiser, also patrolling. A desolate and a naked shore, broken into barren Islands, turned purplish-grey in the sunset, and two lone lighthouses took up their duty. We tramped up and down through that marvellous transparent dusk, with more than the regularity of the Metropolitan Police. There was no lawful night, but a wine-coloured twilight cut in half by the moon-track on the still water. Unless the enemy poled in punts under the shadow of the

shore and the faint mist that lay along it, he could not hope to creep round from the North unobserved. The signalmen blessed their gods—Marine ones—that they were away from the Flagship; the foc'sle and my friend the Marine assured the signalmen that they would be infallibly hanged at the yard-arm when we reached port; and we all talked things over forward as the steady tramp continued.

'I told you so! E's found an 'ole in the rules an' slipped through it,' was the burden of our song. We must have burned more coal than would ever be expedient in War, and we saw imaginary hulls with great zeal till the glorious sunrise, cut off from the battle, peering over the nettings, wet with dew, and just as ignorant of events around us as we shall be when the Real Thing begins.

CHAPTER II

ENTERED suddenly about noon on Sunday, after the disconcerting fashion of cruisers, one of our side flying the general recall, and telling us to go down to the Flag. But when we reached that place we found neither Flag nor battle ships, but the *Powerful* and the *Terrible*, who took us under their wing—all six of us, second and third-class cruisers. Till that point we had been sizeable ships, but those two huge things dwarfed us to mean little tramps. One never gets used to the bulk and height of these berserk Campanias. Then we all began talking. Who knew anything about anything; and who had dragged who round the walls of what? Our next astern gave us one slateful of information which was rather dizzying. That a cruiser at 7·30 that morning had reported to the Battle Fleet, who had spent the night patrolling outside Blacksod Bay, 'Enemy to the Westward.' That the Fleet had given chase; that the Flagship had fired one gun when she came within three miles of the said enemy fifteen miles West of Blacksod Bay. That the enemy had gone in to Blacksod Bay, and, he believed, our own battleships had gone south to Bantry. (I have already explained rudely what the enemy had done.)

That was all we could then arrive at. (The Fleet will learn no more when the Real Thing arrives.) I went forward to hear the text commented on.

SEA-LAWYERS

Said the voice of unshaken experience, 'We've been 'ad. Don't tell *me*.'

'We 'aven't. We've intercepted the beggar,'—a young sea-lawyer began. ''E was rendezvousin' back to Blacksod.'

'What were the rules any'ow?' a voice cut in.

'We wasn't fightin' rules—we was fightin' a man. I tell you we've been 'ad. Didn't I say so when we come round on that long slant from Rockall way? 'E's got round us some'ow.'

'But look 'ere. The signals make it out we've won.'

''*E* won't make it out we've won, though. Both sides'll claim it.'

'That's what they always do. When I was in——'

And one went on to tell of other Manœuvres in which he had apparently taken a leading part, while we jogged Southward behind the *Powerful* as far as the Eastern entrance to Berehaven. But there were no battleships in Bantry Bay. They had gone on to target practice, and presently we cruisers dispersed among the headlands for the same business, with orders to rendezvous a few miles South of the Fastnet, that well-worn mile-post of the Transatlantic liner.

ALMOST INFERNAL MOBILITY

No description will make you realise the almost infernal mobility of a Fleet at sea. I had seen ours called, to all appearance, out of the deep; split in twain at a word, and, at a word, sent skimming beyond the horizon; strung out as vultures string out patiently in the hot sky above a dying beast; flung like a lasso; gathered anew as a riata is coiled at the saddle bow; dealt out card-fashion over fifty miles of green table; picked up, shuffled, and redealt as the game changed. I had seen cruisers flown like hawks, ridden like horses at a close finish, and manœuvred like bicycles; but the wonder of their appearance and disappearance never failed. The *Powerful* spoke, and in ten minutes the cruiser-squadron had vanished; each ship taking her own matches and sulphur to make a hell of her own. And what that hell might be if worked at full power I could, presently, guess as we swung round a headland, and the bugles began. At this point the gunner became a person of importance (in the Navy each hour of the day has its king), and the captains of the guns separated themselves a little from the common herd. Remember, we were merely a third-class cruiser, capable, perhaps, of slaying destroyers in a heavy sea, but meant for the most part to scout and observe. Our armament consisted of eight four-inch quick-fire wire guns, the newest type—two on the foc'sle, four in the waist, and two on the poop, alternating with as many three-pounder Hotchkiss quick-firers. Three Maxims adorned the low nettings. Their water-jackets were filled up from an innocent tin-pot before the game began. It looked like slaking the thirst of devils.

MAN-SLAYING DEVILTRIES

We found an eligible rock, the tip of a greyish headland, peopled by a few gulls—the surge creaming along its base—and a portion of this we made our target, that we might see the effect of the shots and practise the men at firing on a water-line. Up came the beautiful solid brass cordite cartridges ; and the four-inch shells that weigh twenty-five pounds apiece. (The little three-pounders, as you know, have their venomous shell and charge together like small-arm ammunition.) The filled belts of the Maxims were adjusted, and all these man-slaying deviltries waked to life and peered over the side at the unsuspecting gulls. It was 'still ' throughout the ship—still as it will be when the Real Thing arrives. From the upper bridge I could hear, above the beat of the engines, the click of the Lieutenants' scabbards (*Why* should men who need every freedom in action be hampered by an utterly useless sword?); the faint clink of a four-inch breech swung open ; the crisper snick of the little Hotchkiss's falling-block ; and an impatient sewing-machine noise from a Maxim making sure of its lock-action. On his platform over my head the Navigating Officer was giving the ranges to the rock.

'Two thousand seven hundred yards, sir.'

'Two thousand seven hundred yards,'—the order passed from gun to gun—'ten knots right deflection —starboard battery.' The gun-captains muzzled the rubber-faced shoulder-pieces, and the long lean muzzles behind the shields shifted fractionally.

'Try a sighting shot with that three-pounder !'

The smack of cordite is keener, and catches one more about the heart, than the slower-burning black

powder. There was a shrillish gasping wail—exactly like the preliminary whoop of an hysterical woman—as the little shell hurried to the target; and a puff of dirty smoke on the rock-face sent the gulls flying. So far as I could observe there was not even a haze round the lips of the gun. Till I saw the spent case jerked out I did not know which of the clean, precise, and devilish four had spoken.

WHEN THE REAL THING COMES

'Two thousand four hundred,' the voice droned overhead, and the starboard bow four-inch quick-firer opened the ball. Again no smoke; again the song of the shell—not a shriek this time, but a most utterly mournful wail. Again the few seconds suspense (what will they be when the Real Thing comes?) and a white star on the target. The cruiser winced a little, as though some one had pinched her.

Before the next gun had fired, the empty cartridges cylinder of the first was extracted, and by some sleight of hand I could not see the breech had closed behind a full charge. A Martini-Henri could hardly have been reloaded more swiftly.

'Two thousand three hundred,' cried the reader of that day's lessons, and we fell seriously to work; high shriek and low wail following in an infernal fugue, through which, with no regard for decency, the Maxims quacked and jabbered insanely. The rock was splintered and ripped and gashed in every direction, and great pieces of it bounded into the sea.

'Two thousand one hundred.'

'Good shot. Oh, good shot! That was a water-

liner. . . . That was the Marines' three-pounder. Good! . . . Ah—ah! Bad. Damn bad! Short! Miles short! Who fired that shot?'

A shell had burst short of the mark, and the captain of that gun was asked politely if he supposed Government supplied him with three-pound shell for the purpose of shooting mackerel.

And so we went on, till the big guns had fired their quota and the Maxims ran out in one last fiends' flurry, and target-practice for the month was over. The rock that had been grey was white, and a few shining cartridge-cases lay beside each gun.

SQUIRTING DEATH THROUGH A HOSE

Then the horror of the thing began to soak into me. What I had seen was a slow peddling-out of Admiralty allowance for the month, and it seemed to me more like squirting death through a hose than any ordinary gun-practice. What will it be when all the ammunition-hoists are working, when the Maxims' water-jacket puffs off in steam; when the three-pounder charges come up a dozen at a time to be spent twenty to the minute; when the sole limit of four-inch fire is the speed with which the shells and cases can be handled? What will it be when the Real Thing is upon us?

And the smiling, careless faces answered with one merry accord: 'Hell! Every kind of Hell! *But*—things will happen.'

In ancient days there was an etiquette in sea battles. No line-of-battle ship fired at a frigate unless the latter deliberately annoyed her. Then she

blew the frigate out of the water. What will be the etiquette next time? Suppose a cruiser met a battleship with one set of engines unusable crawling along at eight knots. Would she jackal the lame thing and tempt her into wasting ammunition? It is a risky game to play with sides no thicker than an average tea-tray; but under circumstances it might be lucrative. Would she—and a fast cruiser can do this—try to rush her by night, destroyer-fashion? At the beginning of the war she might do all sorts of things; at the end of it she would take exactly that kind of liberty which experience of the other side's *personnel* had shown to be moderately safe. There is no saying what she could or could not do in heavy weather, and Navies that do not like heavy weather; tumble-home boats unused to working in a sea; a beaky and a plated Navy, with big tops that roll and strain, might suffer.

Therefore we must pray for foul weather, head-seas and steep swells, gale that bewilders, cold that numbs, and small fine rain that blinds, chills, and dispirits. Our men know them.

MEN WHO TAKE THEIR CHANCES

Under these conditions the possibilities of a good sea-boat are almost illimitable, given always the men who know how to handle her—the men who will take their chances. And as in the Army so in the Navy runs the unwritten Law: 'You must not imperil the property of the taxpayer committed to your charge or you will be publicly broke; but if you do *not* take every risk you can and more also you

will be broke in the estimation of your fellows. Your men will not love you, and you will never get on.' To do him justice the junior officer steers a very fair line between the two councils. Thanks to our destroyers, which give him an independent command early in his career, he studies a little ingenuity and artifice. They are young on the destroyers—the chattering black decks are no place for the middle-aged—they have learned how to handle 200ft. of shod death that cover a mile in two minutes, turn in their own length, and leap to racing speed almost before a man knows he has signalled the engine-room. In these craft they risk the extreme perils of the sea and make experiments of a kind that would not read well in print. It would take much to astonish them when, at the completion of their command, they are shifted, say, to a racing cruiser. They have been within spitting distance of collision and bumping distance of the bottom; they have tested their craft in long-drawn Channel gales, not grudgingly or of necessity because they could not find harbour, but because they 'wanted to know, don't you know;' and in that embroilment have been very literally thrown together with their men.

ENOUGH TO SOBER ULYSSES

This makes for hardiness, coolness of head, and above all resource. You realise it when you hear the dear boys talk among themselves. The Naval man's experience begins early, and by the time he has reached his majority a Sub-Lieutenant should have seen enough to sober Ulysses. But he utterly

refuses to be sobered. There is no case on record of a depressed Sub. It takes three of him to keep one Midshipman in order; but the combined strength of the Assistant Engineer, the Doctor, and the Paymaster will not subdue one Sub-Lieutenant. He goes his joyous way, impartially and picturesquely criticising his elders and his betters; diverse, undulating, and irrepressible. But when he stands on the bridge at midnight and essays to keep the proper distance in front of the next steel ram dreamily muttering through the water, ten knots an hour, two hundred yards behind him—why then the Sub sweats big drops till he gets used to it. Let us suppose he is third in a line of four, that the hour is near midnight, and he has been on watch since eight. So far, we have kept our distance beautifully: we have even sneered at the next line a mile away to the right, where they have once or twice been 'all over the shop.' In twenty minutes there will come relief, a bowl of hot cocoa, three pulls at a pipe, and blessed bed. The Sub watches the speed-lights of the next ahead, for as those lanterns change so must he adjust his pace. But the next ahead is using up all the basest coal she can find, and the wind blows not less than two million samples of it into his straining eyes. He has—he had—the distance absolutely correct; he would swear to it. The Quartermaster by the tiny wheel half heaves up one big shoulder. Till that moment he has given no sign of life. The Sub's heel taps impatiently on the planking; his mouth hovers over the engine-room voice tube; his lips open to speak to the Quartermaster in case—in case it should be necessary to sheer

out of line; for something has gone wrong with the next ahead. She has badly overrun her station, and sheers to the left of our leading ship. The Sub wipes the cinders out of his left eye and says something.

NOW BEGINS THE FUN

Now begins the fun. The leading ship has slowed a certain number of revolutions—say, from ten knots to nine and a half; but she has not changed her speed-lights in time. We slide out to the right of our next ahead, swiftly and quietly. And now we must all mark time, as it were, till our leader straightens herself. That which was a line has suddenly become a town on the waters; representing roughly three-quarters of a million sterling in value, ten thousand tons weight, and eight hundred lives. Our next ahead lies on our port bow, and—oh, horror!—our next astern is alongside of us. Heaven send that the Captain may not choose this hour to wake. The Sub has slowed her down to eighty-five, but engines are only engines after all, and they cannot obey on the instant. Meantime we can see into the chart-room of her that should have lain behind us. A Navigating Lieutenant sprawled half over the table, cap tilted over forehead to keep out the glare of the lamp, is poring on a chart; we can hear the officer of the watch on her bridge speaking to his Quartermaster, and there comes over to us a whiff of Navy tobacco. She is slowing—she has slowed with a vengeance, and when ships slow too much they lose steerage-way, and, what is far worse, they wake the Captain. This

strikes the Sub with lurid clearness ; but the impetus of the recent ten knots is on us all, and we are all going much faster than we think. Again his foot taps the deck.

ARE THEY NEVER GOING TO SLOW?

Are they never going to slow in the engine-room ? The pointer on the dial before the Quartermaster moves through some minute arc, and our head falls off to the left. It is excessively lonely on this high and lofty bridge, and the spindle-shaped hull beneath looks very unmanageable. Our next ahead draws away slowly from our port bow, and we continue at a safe distance to starboard of her. The line is less of a lump and more of a diagonal than it was. Our next astern is sliding back to where she belongs. Now, two revolutions at a time, the Sub lets us out till he sees our erring sister ahead return to her place, and joyfully slinks in behind her. The Sub mops his heated brow, thanking Heaven that the Captain didn't wake up, and that the tangle was straightened before the end of the watch. But speed-lights unless properly handled—as ours are handled—are, he doubts not, an invention of the Devil. So, also, is the Fleet ; so are all cruisers ; and the sea and everything connected therewith.

Now comes the judgment ! Our leader, of course, cannot signal back down her line, but the signal must be repeated from the leading ship of the line to starboard. Thus, you see, we read it diagonally. A dull glow breaks out at the mast-head of that transmitter of wiggings—and a wigging it

is for somebody—a wigging in drunken winks—long and short ones—irresistibly comic if you don't happen to be in the Service. Once again we are saved. The avenging electric spells out the name of our next ahead, a second-class cruiser—and then—'*Why don't you keep station?*' Let us thank God for second-class cruisers and all other lightning-conductors!

The middle watch comes up; the Sub demands of the stars and the deep profound about him: 'Who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea?' descends the bridge in one light-hearted streak, and three minutes later is beautifully asleep, the ship's kitten purring under his left ear. But the Captain was awake all the time. The change of speed roused him, and he lay watching the tell-tale compass overhead, his mouth at the bridge voice-tube; one eye cocked through the open port, and one leg over the edge of the bunk—in case. The Sub must learn his business by himself—must find confidence in isolation precisely as the Captain did a quarter of a century ago. It is not good for him to know that he is being watched.

Next morning the Captain makes a casual allusion to 'massed fleets in line of sixes and sevens.' 'It was our next ahead, sir,' says the Sub deferentially. 'Yes, it was the next ahead when I was a Sub,' is the reply. 'I know that next ahead.' Then the ward-room, to whom the Sub has been confiding the success of his manœuvres, ask him whether he got to windward of the 'owner'—much.

HOW THE SUB GETS LEARNING

And that is one of the ways in which youth gets learning. On a big battleship, they tell me, the Sub is little better than the Midshipmen he despises. He lives in the gun-room, he goes to school, he is sent on errands, and if he is good he is allowed to preserve discipline while a fraction of the decks are being washed. But on a third-class cruiser he is a watch-officer, an ornament of the ward-room, pitched into responsibility, and he enjoys himself, as I have tried to show.

CHAPTER III

APROPOS of signals—to go on where I left off—we were to have more than enough of them after target-practice. We finished first of all the cruisers, and went on to our rendezvous off the Fastnet, but if we had listened to the passenger—he wanted to lower a boat and investigate the shattered rock—we should have been spared many sorrows. But we were zealous, Mr. Simple, and we went to the Fastnet; and it was hazy, and through the haze we heard a horrible elemental moaning that should have warned us. The battleships which we had not found at Bantry were scattered about those waters at their practice. Then I remembered that a twelve-inch gun discharges a projectile weighing some 800lb. and ranging about ten miles. And we went to the rendezvous encircled by these deep mutterings of invisible monsters, and behold! we came slap on the Flagship, who was running torpedoes. Any other of the big ones would not have mattered, but our luck sent us to the Flag. There was a feeling of calamity in the thick air, and I know one man who was not in the least relieved when she signalled: 'Where are you bound?' We replied we were waiting as

ordered on that spot, for the rest of the cruisers, and remained in a deferential attitude, while the Flagship maintained her horrible composure.

OUR FATAL MISTAKE

Thinking no harm, we drifted some two miles to leeward, which was our fatal mistake, though we kept a skinned eye on her. Presently we saw a signal, but end on, as flags are apt to be when the signaller is dead up wind and the signallee down. We hung our answering pennant at the dip to show that we saw but could not understand, and scuttled up to the Flagship as fast as might be. The first part of the signal was an order to close, and the second expressed a desire to speak to us by semaphore. (Our signalmen's faces were studies in gloom about this crisis; and the sad moaning of the guns went on afar.) We learned that the Flag had been trying to attract our attention for some time, and did not appreciate our *négligé déshabillé*, or words to that effect. There is no excuse in the Navy, and we took what was served out to us by the gibbering semaphore in silence, standing at attention. To tell the truth, we had been rather pleased with our target-practice, and this sudden dash of cold water chilled us. But there is a reason for all things. Now, we must signal the name of the officer of the watch (frantic searchings of heart among the officers) and the signalman (the signalmen had got beyond even despair), on duty on Friday morning last. What the nature of their crime was we knew not, and it was not ours to ask; but later we heard it had something to do with

somebody else's error. We gave that information (the Flag could have learned much more if she had asked for it) and I effaced myself with a great effacement forward, where the wits of the foc'sle were telling the signalman of Friday morning what sorts of death and disrating awaited him.

'WE'VE LOST THE GAME'

'We've lost the game,' said one man. 'First come first served. *That* shows it,' and with this dark saying I was forced to be content.

Then the Flag removed herself, her sixty signalmen, her four-deep strings of signals, and her grim semaphore. Truly was it written :

'Every day brings a ship,
Every ship brings a word,
Well for him who has no fear
Looking seaward, well assured
That the word the vessel brings
Is the word that he would hear.'

Anon the cruisers popped over the horizon, led by the *Powerful*—all save one—and the *Powerful* wished to know where that one had gone. Now the rendezvous given us by the *Powerful* could have been read in two ways. We all knew how the mistake had arisen, and, with one exception, had all repaired to the place which our leader had in her massive mind. But there was no ship, of course, that could stand up to and gently rebuke the *Powerful* save her sister ship the *Terrible*, who signalled politely : 'I suppose the —— is waiting at rendezvous signalled by you?' To this the *Powerful*,

stiffly, with many flags: 'When ships have any doubt about signal, officers should reply: Not understood!' The *Terrible*, more politely than ever: 'Your signal perfectly understood,' meaning thereby, 'My friend, you made a mistake, and you jolly well know it.' We small craft stood back and sniggered while this chaff flew between the two mammoths. The thing must have weighed on the *Powerful's* mind, for late that evening, as we were going home, she woke up and began talking about it in flashes from the mast-head, to the effect that when signals were obviously wrong ships should do something or other laid down in the Regulations.

ASTONISHING THE CROWDED CHANNEL TRAFFIC

But really it made no difference. The missing cruiser cast up presently with one funnel blistered and a windsail rigged aft, which gave her a false air of being hurried and hot; and home we cruisers all went to Portland, past the Wolf and the toothed edges of the Scillies, astonishing the crowded Channel traffic—sometimes a Jersey potato-ketch full of curiosity; or a full-rigged trader of the deep sea, bound for one or other of the Capes; a Norwegian, Dane, German, or Frenchman; and now and again a white-sided, brass bejewelled yacht.

For a few minutes every funnel was in line. Then one saw the *Powerful* pulling out for a sailing ship, and blotting half the horizon with her hull. Then a second-class cruiser would flicker from the line to starboard, all spangled with her mast-head, her speed, helm, and sailing-lights as the pale glimmer of a

fishing-smack's lantern crawled out astern of her. And now it was our turn to give way.

That was a Royal progress. No blind man's buff off the Lizard or dreary game of hunt-the-Needles such as the liners play, but through the heavenly clear night the leisurely, rolling slow-march of the overlords of all the seas.

OURS BY RIGHT OF BIRTH

And the whole thing was my very own (that is to say yours); mine to me by right of birth. Mine were the speed and power of the hulls, not here only but the world over; the hearts and brains and lives of the trained men; such strength and such power as we and the World dare hardly guess at. And holding this power in the hollow of my hand; able at the word to exploit the earth to my own advantage; to gather me treasure and honour, as men reckon honour, I (and a few million friends of mine) forbore because we were white men. Any other breed with this engine at their disposal would have used it savagely long ago. In our hands it lay as harmless as the levin-rods of the Vril-Ya. Thus I stood, astounded at my own moderation, and counted up my possessions with most sinful pride.

The wind, and the smell of it off the coasts, was mine, and it was telling me things it would never dream of confiding to a foreigner. The short, hollow Channel sea was mine—bought for me drop by drop, every salt drop of it, in the last eight hundred years —as short a time as it takes to make a perfect lawn in a cathedral close. The speech on the deck below was mine, for the men were free white men, same as

me, only considerably better. Their notions of things were my notions of things, and the bulk of those notions we could convey one to the other without opening our heads.

THINGS ONE TAKES FOR GRANTED

We had a common tradition, one thousand years old, of the things one takes for granted. A warrant officer said something, and the groups melted quietly about some job or other. That same caste of man—that same type of voice—was speaking in the commissariat in Burma; in barracks in Rangoon; under double awnings in the Persian Gulf; on the Rock at Gibraltar—wherever else you please—and the same instant obedience, I knew, would follow on that voice. And a foreigner would never have understood —will never understand! But I understood, as you would have understood had you been there. I went round, to make sure of my rights as a taxpayer under Schedule D; saw my men in my hammocks sleeping, without shading their eyes, four inches from the white glare of my electric; heard my stokers chaffing each other at my ash-shoot; and fetched up by a petty officer who was murmuring fragments of the Riot Act into my subordinate's attentive ear. When he had entirely finished the task in hand he was at liberty to attend to me. 'Hope you've enjoyed your trip, sir. You see' (I knew what was coming) 'we haven't quite shaken down yet. In another three months we shall be something like.'

No ship is ever at her best till you leave her. Then you hold her up as a shining example to your present craft. For that is England.

My Marine—the skirmisher in South American Suburbs—stood under the shadow of the poop looking like a stuffed man with an automatic arm for saluting purposes; but I knew him on the human side. 'Goin' off to-morrow, ain't you, sir? Well, there are only twenty of us 'ere, but *if* you ever want to see the Marines, a lot of 'em, it might perhaps be worth your while to'—and he gave me the address of a place where I would find plenty of Marines. He spoke as though his nineteen friends were no-class animals; and a foreigner would have taken him at his word.

A 'COMMODIOUS COFFEE-GRINDER'

The entire Ward-room explained carefully that their commodious coffee-grinder must not be taken as a sample of the Navy at its best. Wasn't she a good sea-boat? Oh, yes; remarkably so. Couldn't she go on occasion? Oh, yes. She could go, but, after all, she wasn't a patch on certain other craft, being only a third-class cruiser—practically an enlarged destroyer—a tin-pot of the tinniest. 'Now in my last ship,' the Captain began. That was an unlucky remark, for I remembered that last ship and a certain first night aboard her in the long swell of Simon's Bay, when the Captain took Heaven and Earth and the Admiralty to witness that of all cluttered-up boxes of machinery and bags of tricks his new command was the worst. To hear him now she must have been a trifle larger than the *Majestic* with twice the *Powerful's* speed. We are a deceptive people. 'Come and see us next year when we've

shaken down a bit,' said the Ward-room, 'and you'll like it better.' That last was impossible, but I accepted the offer.

Our cruiser was about to refit at some Dockyard or other in a few days, and I gathered that it would be no fault of the Captain, the Ward-room or the warrant officers if she did not arrive with a list of alterations and improvements as long as her mainmast. So it is with every new ship. The dear boys take her out to see what she can do, and in that process discover what she cannot do. If by any arrangement or rearrangement of stay, stanchion, davit, steam-pipe, bridge, boat-chocks, or hatchway she can, in their judgment, be improved, rest assured that the dockyard will know it by letter and voice. She never gets more than half what she wants, and so is careful to apply for thrice her needs.

DISCONTENTED AND IMPENITENT THIEVES

To her just and picturesque demands the Yard opposes the suspicion of Centuries, saying, unofficially: 'You are all a set of discontented and impenitent thieves. Go away.' The ship, considering her own comfort and well-being for the rest of the commission, replies, also unofficially: 'Ah, you're thinking of the So-and-so. She *was* a nest of pirates if you like: but we're good. We're the most upright ship you ever clapped eyes on, and you're the finest Yard in the Kingdom. You're up to all the ropes. There's no getting round you, and you'll pass our indents. We won't give you any trouble. Just a few minor repairs, and our own

people will carry them out. Don't disturb yourself in the least. Send the stuff alongside and we'll attend to it.'

And when the stuff comes alongside in charge of a slow-minded understrapper they do attend to it. They talk the man blind and dumb, sack his cargoes, and turn him adrift to study vouchers at his leisure. Then the First Lieutenant grins like a Cheshire cat; the carpenter, so called because he very rarely deals with wood, the armourer and the first-class artificers sweat with joy, and the workshop lathes buzz and hum. But the understrapper gets particular beans because a great part of his stuff was meant for another ship, and she is very angry about it.

STOLEN PAINT

Late in the afternoon the defrauded vessel sends over a boat to the *Early Bird*, and wants to know if she has seen or heard anything of some oak baulks, a new gangway grating, some brass-work, and a few drums of white paint.

'Why, was that yours?' says the First Lieutenant. 'We thought it was ours.'

'Well, it isn't. It's ours. Where is it?'

'I'm awfully sorry, but—I say, won't you come and have a drink?'

They come—just in time to see the brass rods in position, the oak baulks converted into some sort of boat-furniture; the gangway platform receives their weary feet, and a fine flavour of paint from a flat forward tells them all they will ever know of the missing drums.

Then they call the First Lieutenant a pirate, and he, poor lamb, says that he was misled by the chuckle-headed understrapper who brought the stuff alongside. Words cannot express the First Lieutenant's contrition. It is too bad, too bad, but 'you know what asses these Dockyard chaps can be.'

With soft words and occasional gin and bitters he coaxes the visitors into their boat again, for he has studied diplomacy under West African Kings. They return to their own place, being young and guileless, and their reception is not cordial. Their Captain says openly that he has not one adequate thief in the ship, and that they had better go into the Church. They should have captured the understrapper early in the day. He will speak to the other Captain. And he does, like a brother, next time he meets him, galley passing galley, going to call on the Admiral.

'You infernal old pirate! What have you done with my paint?' cries the robbed one.

'Me, sar? Not me, sar. My brother Manuel, sar? That paint *mafeesh.* Done gone finish. *Kerritch hogya.*' This from the other potentate.

The coxswains duck their heads to hide a grin. And that is one of the ways they have in the Navy, (*see* Note I.)

The *Early Bird* departs with a reputation that would sink a slave-dhow, to try the same trick on Hong Kong or Bombay Yard.

A BLISSFUL FORTNIGHT

This and more—oh ! much more—did my friends fore and aft convey to me in that blissful fortnight when I was privileged to watch their labours. I heard, undilutedly, what a boy thinks of punishment and the man who reported him for it; how a carpenter regards a Dockyard 'matey,' what are the sentiments of a signaller towards an Admiral and of a stoker towards the Authorities who have designed his washing accommodation. I overheard in the darkness of beautiful nights, fragments of Greek drama from the forward flats which it is my life's regret that I cannot make public; lectures on all manner of curious things delivered by the ship's jester; and totally unveracious reports of conversations with superiors retailed by a delinquent Marine.

Fire and collision-drill, general quarters and the like take on new meaning when they are translated for you once, by the Head who orders them and again by the tail who carry them out. When you have been shown lovingly over a torpedo by an artificer skilled in the working of its tricky bowels, torpedoes have a meaning and a reality for you to the end of your days.

'MEN LIVE THERE'

Next time you see the 'blue' ashore you do not stare unintelligently. You have watched him on his native heath. You know what he eats, and what he says, and where he sleeps, and how. He is no

longer a unit; but altogether such an one as yourself —only, as I have said, better. The Naval Officer chance met, rather meek and self-effacing, in tweeds, at a tennis party, is a priest of the mysteries. You have seen him by his altars. With the Navigating Lieutenant 'on the 'igh an' lofty bridge persecuting his vocation' you have studied stars, mast-head angles, range-finders, and such all; the First Lieutenant has enlightened you on his duties as an Upper Housemaid, (*see* Note Ia.) and the Juniors have guided you through the giddy whirl of gunnery, small-arm drill, getting up an anchor, and taking kinks out of a cable. So it comes that next time you see, even far off, one of Her Majesty's cruisers, all your heart goes out to her. Men live there.

CHAPTER IV

IT was the Captain's coxswain (*see* Note II.)—precise, immaculate, and adequate as ever—who met the returning guest at Devonport a year later—September, 1898. This time my cruiser was not with the Fleet, but on urgent private affairs. A misguided collier had seen fit to sit on her ram for a minute or so in Milford Haven, a few days before, and had twisted it thirteen inches to starboard. The collier was beached as soon as possible, and the Admiral he said to us (this I got from the coxswain as we drove to North Corner, by night, through blue-jacketed Devonport): 'Can you go round to Plymouth with your nose in that state?' 'Lord love you, yes,' said we, or words to that effect. 'Very good,' said the Admiral, 'then you go.' This we did at an average speed of sixteen knots, through a head-sea, with a collision-mat over our nose ('Same mat we used when we tied up the *Thrasher*, sir'), and we ran her up to eighteen point two for a few hours to see how the bulkhead would stand it. The carpenter and the carpenter's mate ('Yes, they're the same as last year, sir') sat up to watch, but nothing happened.

'An' now we're under orders to go back and join

the Fleet at Bantry. We've been cruising all round England since August.'

THE RECORD OF A YEAR

Once aboard the lugger the past twelve months rolled up like a chart that one needs no longer. The 'commodious coffee-grinder' welcomed me as a brother, for by good luck no one had been changed; the same faces greeted me in the little ward-room, and we fell to chattering like children. Had I seen the new fore and aft bridge that we had managed to screw out of the Dockyard? A great contraption—a superior contraption. We had worked in a little extra deck under the forebridge, so that now the signalman had a place to stand in, which I would remember was not the case last year. Had I heard of our new coaling record? Nearly fifty tons per hour, which for a third-class cruiser represented four times that amount for a battleship. Had I heard of the zephyr that blew at Funchal; of unrecorded evolutions in Minorca Bay; of the First Lieutenant's great haul of paint; of a recent target-practice when nothing was left of the target; of the influenza that overtook the steam-whistle; and a hundred other vital matters?

The record of a year with the Channel Fleet is not to be told in two hours, but I gathered a good deal ere I dropped into my well-remembered berth that joyous night. We departed at noon the next day, unhampered by signals. A liner leaves Plymouth in one style; a cruiser snakes out from Devonport in quite another, which was explained to me on the 'ʻigh an' lofty bridge' as we skated round buoy after buoy,

courteously pulled out a little not to interfere with a yacht race, and ran through the brown-sailed Plymouth fishing fleet. It was divine weather—still, cloudless, and blue—and the bridge was of opinion that he who had a farm should sell it and forthwith go to sea.

OUR NOBLE SELVES

The Cornwall coast slid past us in great grey-blue shadows, laid out beyond the little strip of sail-dotted blue ; but my eyes were all inboard considering our noble selves. We had accumulated all sorts of small improvements since last year. She had shaken into shape, as a new house does when one has decided where to put the furniture. The First Lieutenant, as usual, explained that we were in no sense clean ; that twenty ton at least of the four hundred we had just taken in lay about the deck in dust, and that it would cost a fortnight to put any appearance on her.

'We're supposed to be burning No. 2 Welsh. It's road sweepings and soot really. That's on account of the Welsh Coal Strike. Isn't it filthy ? We smoked out the whole of the Fleet and the Rock of Gibraltar the other day. But wait till you see some of the others. They're worse. Isn't she a *pukka* pigsty ?'

From the landsman's point of view she seemed offensively clean, but it is hard to please a First Lieutenant. Ours utilised the delay at Devonport to touch her up outside ; and the perfect weather at Bantry to paint her thoroughly inside. The only time he left her was to pull round her in a boat and see how she looked from various points of view. Then I think he was satisfied—for nearly half a day.

RASH INTEREST IN GUN PRACTICE

Over against Falmouth we found the sea sufficiently empty for gun practice, and went to work at two thousand six hundred yards on the little, triangular, canvas target, all splintered and bepatched from past trials. This year the three-pounders were using up some black powder ammunition, and with the wind behind us we were villainously wrapped in smoke. But for all that the shots were very efficiently placed on and about the tiny mark. One shrapnel burst immediately above the thing, and the deep was peppered with iron from above. It looked like the cloud-wristed hand of a god (as they draw it in the Dutch picture-books) dropping pebbles into a pond. The more one sees of big gun practice the less one likes it; but a big yacht of the R.Y.S. thought otherwise, streaming down on us of a sudden with all the rash interest of a boy in next-door's fireworks.

'She thinks the target is a derelict,' said the bridge. 'She's coming for salvage. She'll be right in the middle of it in a minute.'

'No, she won't. Starboard bow Maxim there—thirteen hundred yards.'

The little demon set up the 'irritating stammer' that the nine point two gun found so objectionable, and spattered up the blue all about the canvas, as a swizzle-stick works up a cocktail.

Our friend turned on her heel with immense promptitude and scuttled to windward.

Later on I heard some interesting tales of craft—excursion steamers for choice—anchoring between a man-of-war and her target because their captains had

heard that there would be gun practice, and the passengers, at a shilling a head, wished to see the fun.

'But they didn't think,' said my informant, 'that *I* was the man who'd have been hung, drawn, and quartered if a life was lost. They anchored slap behind the Island I was firing at—experimental firing at a dummy gun, if you please, with six-inchers, twelve-pounders, and Maxims all turned loose together. They were angry when we told 'em to go away!'

* * * * * * *

Out of the strong-shouldered Atlantic swell—bluer than sapphires—rose the double-fanged rock of the Fastnet. We were close enough to see its steps and derricks and each wave as it shot thirty feet up the rocks—the Fastnet in fair weather. It was like meeting a policeman in evening dress. One does not think of the Fastnet save as a blessed welcoming wink of light through storm and thick weather.

BIG ATLANTIC ROLLERS

The Irish coast is a never-failing surprise to the big Atlantic rollers. They trip and ground—you can see them check—on the shallows; fling up a scornful eyebrow and then lose their temper and shape in great lashings of creamy foam.

'That's Berehaven,' said the bridge, indicating an obscure aperture in the jagged coast-line. 'We shall find the Fleet round the corner. The tide's setting us up a little. Did you ever read "The Two Chiefs of Dunboy?" We shall open Dunboy House in a minute round the corner.'

'And a half-nine!' sang the leadsman, cursing the long-stocked port-anchor under his breath, for he had to cast to one side of it and it stuck out like a cat's whiskers.

We were between two rocky beaches, split and weathered by all the gales of the Atlantic, black boulders embroidered with golden weed, and beryl bays where the rollers had lost their way and were running in rings. Behind them the green, tiny-fielded land, dotted with white cottages, climbed up to the barren purple hills.

'Ah! The *Arrogant's* here anyhow. See her puff!'

THE STRONGEST FLEET IN THE WORLD.

A monstrous plume of black, heavy smoke went up to the sky. We whipped round a buoy and came on the Fleet. There were eight battleships alike as peas to the outsider; and four big cruisers. They were not cruising or manœuvring just then; but practising their various arts and crafts.

The Marines fell in on the poop, and with bugles and all proper observances we paid our compliments as we ran past the sterns of the cruisers, waiting the Admiral's word to moor.

'He's given us a billet of our own. Under his wing too.' An officer shot down on to the foc'sle, while the yeoman of signals, whose nose is that of a hawk, kept an unshut eye on the Flag.

'Isn't there a four-foot patch somewhere about here?' said a calm and disinterested voice. The Navigator having brought her in did not need to

wrestle with cables; and our anchors with their low, cramped davits are no treat.

'We told 'em about our anchors in the Dockyard,' said the bridge. 'We told 'em so distinctly, and they said: "We're very much obliged to you for the information, and we'll make the changes you recommend—in the next boat of your class." That's what I call generosity.'

'Does that ship always behave like that?' I asked. From all three funnels of a high, stubby cruiser the smoke of a London factory insulted the clean air.

'Oh, no; she's only burning muckings like the rest of us. She's our "chummy" ship. She's a new type—she and the *Furious*. Fleet rams they call 'em. Rather like porcupines, aren't they?'

The two had an air of bristling, hog-backed ferocity, strangely out of keeping with the normal reserve of a man-of-war.

The *Blake*, long and low, looked meek and polite beside them, but I was assured that she could blow them out of the water. Their own Captains, of course, thought otherwise.

ASHORE IN IRELAND

All Ireland was new to me, and I went ashore to investigate Castletown's street of white houses, to smell peat smoke and find Dan Murphy, owner of a jaunting car and ancient friend of the ward-room. In this quest me and the Navigator mustered not less than half the male population of Cork County, the remainder being O'Sullivan's; but we found Dan at last

—old, grizzled, with an untameable eye, voluble and beautifully Celtic.

'Will I meet ye to-morrow at Mill Cove at nine-thirty? I will. Here's my hand an' word on it. Will I dhrive ye to Glenbeg for the fishing? I will. There's my hand an' word on it. Do I mean it? Don't I know the whole livin' fleet, man an' boy, for years? '

He appeared at the appointed hour with a raw-boned horse and wonderful yarns of trout taken by 'the other gentlemen' in Glenbeg, the lough of our desire, fourteen miles across the hills. It was a cloudless day with a high wind—bad for trout but good for the mere joy of life; and the united ages of my companions reached forty-five. We were quite respectable till we cleared Castletown, and such liberty-men as might have been corrupted by our example. Then we sang and hung on to the car at impossible angles, and swore eternal fidelity to the bare-footed damosels on the road, they being no wise backward to return our vows; and behaved ourselves much as all junior officers do when they escape on holiday. It was a land of blue and grey mountains, of raw green fields, stone-fenced, ribbed with black lines of peat, and studded with clumps of gorse and heather and the porter-coloured pools of bog water. Great island-dotted bays ran very far inland, and bounding all to Westward hung the unswerving line of Atlantic. Such a country it was as, without much imagination, one could perceive its children in exile would sicken for—a land of small holdings and pleasant green ways where nobody did more work than was urgent.

ROARING DAY OF SUN AND WIND

At last we came on an inky-black tarn, shut in by mountains, locked and lonely and lashed into angry waves by a downward-smiting blast.

There was no special point in the fishing ; not even when the Sub-Lieutenant tried to drown himself; but the animal delight of that roaring day of sun and wind will live long in one memory. We had it all to ourselves—the rifted purple flank of Lackawee, the long vista of the lough darkening as the shadows fell ; the smell of a new country, and the tearing wind that brought down mysterious voices of men from somewhere high above us.

None but the Irish can properly explain away failure. We left with our dozen fingerlings, under the impression—Mister Cornelius Crowley gave it—that we had caught ten-pounders.

CHAPTER V

So home, blown through and through with fresh air ; sore with hanging on to the car and laughing at nothing ; to dine with two Cruiser Captains aboard one of the big fleet-rams. My hosts had been friends since their *Britannia* days (it is this uniformity of early training that gives to the Navy its enduring solidarity), and, one reminiscence leading to another, I listened enchanted to weird yarns in which Chinese Mandarins, West Coast nigger Chiefs, Archimandrites, Turkish Pashas, Calabrian Counts, dignity balls, Chilian beachcombers, and all the queer people of the earth were mingled.

'But it's a lonely life—a lonely life,' said one. 'I've commanded a ship since Eighty something, and —you see.'

How could one help seeing? Between the after-cabin and the rest of the world (with very few exceptions) lies the deep broad gulf that is only over-passed by sentries, signalmen, and subordinates entering with reports. A light tap, a light foot, a doffed cap, and —'Rounds all correct, sir.' Then the silence and the loneliness settle down again

beyond the hanging red curtain in the white steel bulkhead. Herman Melville has it all in *White Jacket*, but it is awesome to see with bodily eyes.

Sometimes the talk gets serious, and the weather-bitten faces discuss how they would 'work her in a row.' Each delivers his opinion with side-digs at his neighbour, less heavily armoured or more lightly gunned, but the general conclusion (which I shall not give) is nearly always the same. It is a terrible power that they wield, these Captains, for, saving the Admiral, there is no one that can dictate to them in the exercise of their business. They make their ships as they make or unmake the careers of their men. Yet, mark how Providence arranges an automatic check! It is in the Navy that you hear the wildest and freest adjectives of any Service, the most blistering characterisation of superiors, the most genuinely comic versions of deeds that elsewhere might be judged heroic.

A SERVICE OF HUMOURISTS

Things are all too deadly serious and important for any one to insult by taking seriously. Every branch of the Service is forced to be a humourist in spite of itself; and by the time men reach the rank of Captain the least adaptable have some saving sense of fun hammered into them. A Captain remembers fairly well what song the Midshipmen were used to sing about the Lieutenant; what views he held in his own Lieutenancy of his Commander, and what as a Commander he thought of his Captain. If he forgets these matters, as in heat, on lonely

stations, or broken with fever some men do, then God help his ship when she comes home with a crop of Court-martials and all hands half crazy!

But to go back to methods of attack. You can hear interesting talk among the juniors when you sit on a man's bunk of an afternoon, surrounded by the home photographs, with the tin-bath and the shore-going walking sticks slung up overhead. They are very directly concerned in War, for they have charge of the guns, and they speculate at large and carelessly. We (I speak for our cruiser) are not addicted to swear in the words of the torpedo Lieutenant because we do not carry those fittings; but we do all devoutly believe that it is the business of a cruiser to shoot much and often (*see* Note III). What follows is, of course, nonsense—the merest idle chaff of equals over cigarettes; but rightly read it has its significance.

'*The* first thing to do,' says authority aged Twenty-One, 'is to be knocked silly by concussion in the conning-tower. Then you revive when all the other chaps are dead, and win a victory off your own bat —*à la* illustrated papers. 'Wake up in Haslar a month later with your girl swabbing your forehead and telling you you've wiped out the whole Fleet.'

'Catch me in the conning-tower! Not much!' says Twenty-Three. 'Those bow-guns of yours will stop every shot that misses it; an' the upper bridge will come down on you in three minutes.'

'Don't see that you're any better off in the waist. You'd get the funnels and ventilators and all the upper fanoodleums on top of *you*, anyhow,' is the retort. 'We're a lot too full of wood, even with our boats out of the way.'

'The poop's good enough for me,' says Twenty-Four (that is his station). 'Fine, light airy place, and we can get our ammunition handier than you can forward.'

'What's the use of that?' says he in charge of the bow guns. 'You've got those beastly deck torpedo-tubes just under you. Fancy a Whitehead smitten on the nose by one little shell. You'd go up.'

"So'd you. She'd blow the middle out of herself. If they took those tubes away we could have a couple more four-inchers there. There'd be heaps of room for their ammunition in the torpedo magazine.'

GUNS AND TORPEDOES

We are blessed with a pair of deck torpedo-tubes, which weigh about ten tons, and are the bane of our lives. Our class is a compromise, and the contractors have generously put in a little bit of everything. But public opinion (except the Gunner) is unanimous in condemning those dangerous and hampering tubes.

'Torpedoes are all rot on this class unless they're submerged. Two more four-inchers 'ud be a lot better. They're as handy as duck-guns. I say, did you see that last shrapnel of mine burst over the target? I laid it myself.' Twenty-Three looks round for applause, but the other guns deride.

'That's all luck,' says Twenty-One, irreverently. 'Mine burst just beyond. It would have been dead right for an end-on shot. It would have snifted her

just on the engine-room hatch. Sound place that. It mixes up the engines.'

'Mahan says, somewhere, that broadside fighting is going to pay with our low freeboards, because most shots go wrong in elevation. Of course, broadside-on, a shell that misses you misses you clean. It don't go hopping along your upper works as it would if you were end-on.'

'Oh, I meant my shot for an end-on shot, of course,' says Twenty-one; and some one promptly sits on him.

'BEAKING' IN A GALE

'No-o,' says Twenty-Four, meditatively. 'What we *really* want if we ever go into a row is weather—lots of it. Good old gales—regular smellers. Then we could run in and beak 'em while it's thick. I believe in beaking.' (That belief, by the way, is curiously general in the Navy.)

'D'you mean to say you'd ram with a tea-tray like ours? I'm glad you aren't the skipper,' I interrupt.

'Oh, *he'd* beak like a shot, if he saw his chance. Of course, he wouldn't beak anything our size—it 'ud be cheaper to hammer her—but take the —— (he named a ship that does not fly Our flag). If you got in on *her* almost anywhere she'd turn turtle. And she cost about a million and a quarter. It's just a question of L.S.D.'

'And what 'ud *we* do afterwards, please?'

'Ah, that's our strong point. What happened when that collier drifted down on us at Milford?

It only improved our steaming power, didn't it? We're a regular honeycomb of compartments forward. I believe you could swipe off twenty foot of her forward, and she'd get home somehow,' says an expert, enthusiastically.

'Bit risky,' says Twenty-One. 'That ship you talked of is awfully plated up topside, but all her underpinnings are pretty weak. If you could lob in a few shell under some of those forward sponsons of hers, I believe she'd crumple up with the weight of her own guns. But (sorrowfully) you'd need a nine point two to do that properly.'

'Beak her! Beak her! Catch her in a gale, coming out of harbour' (the speaker named the very port). 'It takes their people a week to get their tummies straight.'

'Yes, but they never come out of harbour. At least they didn't in the old days. And if they do, *we* sha'n't be allowed a look-in. We shall be used for scouting—coaling all day and steaming all night. But we want those deck-tubes taken out all the same.'

'I'd like target-practice every week,' says another. 'Say four times our present allowance of practice-ammunition. It 'ud wear the guns out, but it 'ud pay.'

And so the talk goes on; varying with each ship. Some of them are all for torpedoes, and have submarine vaults the size of a small church devoted to this game; but we, being what we are, are mainly for guns, and the Gunner who is in charge of the torpedoes has a hard time of it when he runs his quarterly trials.

'A beautiful thing,' says he, as the silver-coloured devil flops from the tube and tears away towards the mark. . . . 'Well, I'm blowed.' The torpedo has sheered away to the left, and now is poisoning the air with its garlic-scented Holmes light, fifty yards from the target.

'What did I tell you?' says some one *sotto voce.* 'We could have got in a dozen shots from the four inch while you were touching off that boomerang.'

'They'd hang you on the —— if you laughed at torpedoes.'

'I wouldn't if ours were submerged, but with these deck-tubes one never knows how they'll take the water. That thing must have canted as it fell.'

The Gunner looks grieved to the quick, but is presently consoled by a few score pounds of gun-cotton, and goes off with grapnels and batteries to practise 'sweeping' and 'creeping' at the mouth of the bay with a few score other boats. They mine and countermine expeditiously in the Channel Fleet. The process is a technical one, and need not be described here, for there is no necessity to make public either the area covered with mines or the time that it took to lay them. The Gunner returned with a detailed account and some fish that had been stunned by concussion.

'It was a nice little show,' he said. 'A very nice little show. Did you happen to see our smoke?'

I had seen one end of Bantry Bay ripped up from its foundations, but did not inquire further.

'MAN AND ARM BOATS'

Many things are impressive and not a few terrifying in the Fleet, but the most impressive sight of all is the swift casting-forth from the trim black sides of the instruments and ministers of death. They vary hourly, according to the taste and fancy of the speller. A wisp of signals floats from the Flagship. Our little cruiser erupts—boils like a hive—and some one takes out a watch. There is a continuous low thunder of bare feet, a clatter, always subdued, of arms snatched from the racks, a creaking of falls and blocks, and the noise of iron doors opening and shutting. Of a sudden the decks stand empty; the Maxims have gone from the bulwarks, and the big cutters are away, pulling mightily for the Flagship. From each one of our twelve neighbours pour forth the silent crowded boats. They cluster round the Flag, are looked over, and return. They are not merely boats with men in them. They are fully provisioned; the larger ones have boat-guns, the smaller Maxims, with a proper allowance of ammunition and spare parts, medical chests, and all the hundred oddments necessary for independent action. All or any one of them can be used at once for patrol work or for landing parties, can be switched off from the main system, as a light engine is switched off up a siding. Each unit is complete and self-contained. In ten minutes the boats are back again, the Maxims replaced, the rifles stacked and racked, the provisions and water returned to store. The ordinary routine of 'man and arm boats' is over.

LANDING PARTIES

Another signal (*see* Note IV.) will turn out, transport, land, embark, and disembark three thousand armed men, with twenty-one field guns, in the inside of three hours; leaving six thousand men in the ships to carry on if necessary the work of a bombardment; or you can vary the programme and load a mere thousand or so into eight identical double-funnelled fifteen-knot steam launches—one from each battleship—and play miniature Fleet-manœuvres to your heart's content. They are as used to performing evolutions together as are their big parents. They can tow half-a-dozen cutters a-piece and work in four feet of water. As an experiment you can land your twenty-one-field guns with sufficient men to throw up earth-works round them; or you can yoke men to the guns and drag them up the flanks of mountains. Or, as in mining operations, you can turn loose all hell with a string to it—pay it out and swiftly drag it back again. One never wearies of watching the outrush and influx of the landing parties; the swift flight of the boats; the minute's check at the beach; the torrents of blue and red pouring over the bows; and the loose-knit line of mingled red and blue winding away inland among the boulders and heather.

Long practice so perfectly conceals Art that the thing presents no points of the picturesque; makes no noise; calls for no more comment than the set of the waves before a prevailing wind. Only when you go over certain MS. books, giving the name, station,

and duties of every man aboard under all conceivable contingencies, do you realise how wheel works within wheel to the ordered, effortless end.

SUPERIOR AND ADEQUATE PERSONS

You can disarrange the clockwork as much as you please, but the surviving cogs and rachets will still go on and finish the job; for I do honestly believe that, if any accident removed from the Fleet every single Commissioned Officer, the Warrant and Petty Officers would still carry on with resource and fertility of invention till properly relieved. The public is apt to lump everything that does not carry the executive curl on its coat-sleeve as some sort of common sailor. But a man of twenty-five years' sea experience—cool, temperate, and judgmatic, such an one as the ordinary Warrant Officer—is a better man than you shall meet on shore in a long day's march. His word is very much law forward. He knows his men, if possible, better than the officers. He has seen, tried, approved, and discarded hundreds of dodges and tricks in all departments of the ship. At a pinch he can wring the last ounce out of his subordinates by appeals unbefitting for an officer to make, by thrusts at pride and vanity, which he has studied more intimately than any one else. Hear him expounding his gospel to a youth who does not yet realise that the Navy is his father and his mother and his only Aunt Jemima; go out with him when he is in charge of a cutter; listen to him in the workshop; in the flats forward; between the pauses of practice-firing, or up on the booms taking stock of the boats,

and you will concede that he is a superior and an adequate person.

'Yes, I suppose it's all very nice,' said one of them, while I applauded and admired some manœuvre that he did not trouble to raise an eyelid for, 'but just think what we could do if we had the men all together for three years steady! As it is, we're practically a Training Squadron. When we get back to Plymouth they'll snatch a hundred of our best men an' turn 'em over to the Mediterranean, and we'll have to take up a lot of new ones. The Mediterranean have got the better trained men, but they haven't our chances of working together.'

'But the men are trained when you get 'em, surely?'

'Yes; but you get the same lot in one ship all through her commission, and you put a polish on 'em.'

'P.Q. 2,' cried a signalman. That was a well-known message. It meant: 'Get into your boats as fast as you know how and pull round the Fleet.' The men leaped on to the nettings and fell outboard like dolphins.

'That shows it,' said the Warrant Officer with a sniff. 'Look at that man crawlin' into his place' (to me he seemed to be flying). 'Our first boat ought to be away in fifteen seconds' (it was quite thirty before the last drew clear). 'There go the Arrogants.' His face darkened. Was it possible that that tip-tilted, hog-backed cruiser had——

'We're well first away,' said a Lieutenant.

'Hum! We ought to have been more previous,' said the Warrant Officer. 'The Arrogants nearly

beat us. We love the *Arrogant*, but we do not allow her to lead if we can help it.'

A TALE WORTH TELLING

Another time we were not so lucky. The tale is worth telling to show (a) how one is at the mercy of one's subordinates, and (b) how there is no excuse in the Navy. At odd hours, chiefly in the black night, the Admiral, feeling lonely, calls up one boat from each ship to his gangway, and the signal, which we will label T.V.K., reads: 'Cutter to Flagship from each ship; third-class cruisers to send whaler.' Warned by experience, the First Lieutenant, whom it is not easy to catch napping, had the whaler's crew sleeping all handy by, where one order would send them out like fly-stung cattle. A cutter requires about three times as many men, and on a small cruiser one cannot keep these together. Enter, then, at 11.45 p.m., a zealous signalman with the words: 'Cutter to the Flagship.' In his haste he had omitted to read the conclusion of the signal vouchsafing us the whaler, and (this was his black error) told no one that it was 'T.V.K.,' which would have explained the situation. No, he needs must say 'cutter'; so cutter it was. After the men had been variously dug out of their hammocks and the heavy boat got away, the Flagship wanted to know why we were several scandalous minutes behind our time. It was a direct reflection on the ship and its smartness; a galling and unanswerable wigging that makes men dance and swear with rage. We could only have said that the signal was misread, which would not

have helped us in the least; so we shut our mouths and killed the signalman next morning. His own chief, the hawk-nosed Yeoman of Signals, flung him bound to the executioner, saying: 'He ought to have known, sir; he ought to have known.' So he was boiled, scraped, and sand-papered, his hair was cut and his number was taken; after which he went forward and heard precisely what the lower deck thought of him. Then a visiting Captain's galley hanging on to the gangway rubbed it in gracefully and casually, and a fat beef-boat condoled with us ironically, and the whaler (*see* Note V.) heard all about it next time she went sailing without an officer in the stern-sheets. It was most annoying, but can't you see how easily this sort of accident may happen?

CHAPTER VI

I HAD the honour of dining on the Flagship next night, and so contagious is the naval spirit that I went there, as it were, annoyed and uneasy over the matter of the misread signal. One cannot regard an Admiral in the exercise of his duty as a mere human. It is in his power to make you get up an anchor by hand if he thinks you are slack; he can stop your coaling and bid you man and arm boats in the middle of the grimy mess; he can make you repeat a certain business till you are sick and dizzy; or he can raise you to high honour by signalling: 'Well done, So-and-so. Evolution creditably performed.' He blocks up all the horizon when he appears on it. At six miles off, across the windy blue, the spirit may move him to chat with you, and if your best signalman have not his best telescope at his best eye, and the Admiral be forced to repeat his remarks, you will hear about it at closer range.

THE ISOLATION OF AN ADMIRAL

The loneliness of a Captain is society beside the isolation of an Admiral. He goes up on the after-bridge, and moves some £10,000,000 worth of iron and steel at his pleasure. No man can stop him, few

dare even suggest. Then comes the sea, as it did round the Orkneys, and a little roaring 'roost' marked with a few hair-lines on the chart—a tide-rip racing between ledges—buffets his stately galleons, and drives them lightly out of all formation. One never connects a clergyman with St. Paul; but one cannot look at an Admiral without speculating on our apostolic Succession of the Sea. With these powers were clothed Nelson and the rest—'Admirals all.' And this particular piece of flesh and blood is of the same order, and rank, and breed, and responsibility—the Admiral in command of the Channel Fleet. And now it is peace. ('Yes, I have enjoyed my visit very much, thank you, sir.') But if War came to-morrow? What would he do? How would he think? What does he think about now? He would go up on the bridge with the Flag-Lieutenant, and the ships would be cleared for action. ('No, I've never seen a Temperley transporter at work.') And then—and then . . . .?

It was a strange dinner for one guest at least—with its flowers and crystal and quiet conversation; the band playing on deck, and the lights of the Fleet twinkling all down the Bay.

There was a Prince in it who was also a Flag-Captain, and he set one thinking; and there were Commanders and Lieutenants in it, and it was all very pretty and gracious; but between me and the *menu* rose a vision of last year's play-war—a battle-ship cleared for action, naked and grim, like a man swimming with a knife between his teeth—a wet and streaming hull thundering through heavy, rain-hammered seas.

DINNER IN A GUN-ROOM

'Well, now you've done that,' said Twenty-One, 'suppose you come and dine in a Gun-room.' (We have none on the cruiser, being all ward-room, with a cabin apiece.) 'I'll chaperon you to the best disciplined Gun-room in the Fleet. *We'll* show you.'

So we went, Twenty-One and me, to another huge battleship, precisely like the Admiral's; but this time Captains, Commanders, and Lieutenants were invisible, or showed only as superior luminaries far along the decks. We dealt with nothing above the rank of Sub-Lieutenant, and the greetings of that grade are cordial and warm. Down below—it was twice the size of our ward-room—we found their Gun-room, which differs in appointments and fittings from everything Marryat conceived, but I think the old unquenchable spirit persists. Of the twenty odd inhabitants, a dozen at least were Midshipmen, and therefore, as Twenty-One explained, 'didn't count.' They talked among themselves in subdued eager whispers, dropping in to the meal as they came off duty. The senior Sub-Lieutenant (quite nineteen years old) was responsible for the justly vaunted discipline; and it is no small thing to reduce to silence boys of sixteen to eighteen, all full of natural and acquired deviltry. But it was done according to the custom of the Navy and the etiquette of the Gun-room, whose laws change not.

MIDSHIPMEN

Here the young Nelson learns to obey, in silence and at a run. He has been broken in on the *Britannia*, but the Gun-room gives him enduring polish. The Admiral knows a Midshipman rather as the Almighty knows a blackbeetle; the Captain knows him as the Head of Harrow might know a babe in a perambulator; the First Lieutenant knows him as the Head of the Games knows a fag in the Lower Third; but the senior Sub-Lieutenant of the Gun-room knows him as a brand to be snatched from the burning; and works over him accordingly. In return, the Midshipman patronises the Admiral at a safe distance; is blandly superior to his Captain—also at a safe distance; sings time-honoured lampoons about the First Lieutenant at a very safe distance; but most strictly obeys the senior Sub-Lieutenant. For seven years, counting his time in the *Britannia*, he dresses at a chest and sleeps in a hammock, getting to know himself and his associates with that deadly stark intimacy that only flourishes in the Navy. There are no excuses in his Service. He must not answer back; and he must do what he is told—not immediately, but sooner, much sooner. These are the years that weed out those that have mistaken their calling. The incompetents go home, and curse the Navy evermore. The virtuous stay on and learn to steal brass boiler-tubes for their boats; learn to smoke secretly in the fighting-tops (they are forbidden tobacco till eighteen); fall into and out of all manner of tight places that require dexterity and a cheek of cold-drawn brass; pick up

more than they learn under the Instructor from the talk of the Warrant Officers and men and the carefully-watched mistakes of their elders; and when they reach commissioned rank impart their lore to their successors with a dirk-scabbard.

A REPUBLIC AND A DESPOTISM

If 'White Jacket' had not served before the mast, what a picture he might have given us of the Gun-room! It is at once a Republic and a Despotism—the Extreme Left and the unswerving Centre of old tradition. Individually it is always in hot water; collectively it can and does criticise with point and freedom anything and everything on its horizon, from Fleet Manœuvres to the fit of an Instructor's collar. Pungent, merciless, indomitable is the Gun-room, but it preserves discipline. The senior Sub-Lieutenant (one could not help thinking of O'Brien when he cured Peter of the sea-sickness) stuck a fork into the equivalent for a beam overhead. Ere it ceased vibrating the Midshipmen had gone, flitting like bats; had flung themselves backwards from their seats, and were through the door.

'That's when we think the conversation might hurt their little morals,' said my host. 'But they can move much quicker than that.'

'Make 'em do it again,' said Twenty-One—a Midshipman three years ago. 'You're getting awfully slack, *I* think. What do you do when——?' he presented a contingency.

'Oh, then we——' The Sub-Lieutenant described the course of action with minute particularity, adding: 'Wouldn't you like to see it done?'

Set it to my account that I saved somebody's darling from being butchered to make a Gun-room holiday. But the Midshipmen have an asylum of their own in the School-room, where, I was assured, they were worked within an inch of their lives. The remnant seemed unusually healthy, for when we went out to visit a big smoking-concert on the Flagship I caught glimpses of limber youths racketting in dumb show round their hammocks.

Not being privileged to have speech with them, I asked Twenty-One what the 'protective diplomacy' of Midshipmen might be. He gave me to understand that stirring a hornets' nest with the bare toe was tame and pale beside too thoroughly irritating the junior members of the Gun-room. Had himself been concerned in such revolutions.

'We got licked, of course,' he concluded cheerfully, 'but the seniors let us alone after that. Wasn't it a beautifully disciplined Mess, though? I wish you could see 'em at sea in weather. There's a Midshipman (he used the other term) told off to every scuttle to open it between waves. If he lets in any water of course he catches it. I had about five years of that sort of thing. Well, now we'll go over to the concert.'

'UNCLE HENRY'S' SMOKING CONCERT

Said a shrill voice casually: 'Are you goin' to patronise our Uncle Henry's show to-night?'

'I think I ought to. I don't want him to think I'm cutting him. Besides, he'd like to meet one zealous an' efficient officer. It 'ud cheer him up.'

I whipped round, to see two small boys of blank countenances studying the deck-beams. It was humanly conceivable that 'Uncle Henry' might be the Admiral's nickname, but could two Midshipmen —? I fled lest the ship should blow up under me, and left those zealous and efficient ones to their dignity.

Imagine a quarter-deck seventy-five feet wide and a hundred and twenty long, awninged over, decked with flags and a triple row of white and purple electrics, the massed bands of the Fleet at the far end, and all the rest, from the stern to the snowy barbette, a whirl of uniforms of all ranks: Captains with and without aiguillettes; Commanders, Officers of Marines, in their blue-faced mess-jackets, with the laurelled globe on the lapel, Engineers, Paymasters, Clerks, and the others—a shifting carpet of blue and gold and red and black. The muzzles of the forty-six ton guns sheered up above us, and high over all, on the top of the barbette, which was disguised with flags and carpets, sat the Admiral. It was an amazing spectacle—the Fleet at play, and for some reason, it made me choke. One recovered here men last met at the other end of the world—at Gaspé, Bermuda, Vancouver, Yokohama, Invercargill, or Bombay—rovers and rangers in Her Majesty's men-of-war. Then we danced; for this also is the custom of the Navy, that when a man has been working like several niggers all day he should, on chance given, dance. And that is why the Naval man dances so well. He begins, as I have seen, on the *Britannia*, whose decks are fairly open. Then he dances on such occasions as these, in and out among all the fittings of a battle-ship's deck.

'Makes us awfully handy with our feet,' said Twenty-One, mopping himself in the pauses of a waltz. 'Won't you take a turn? No end good exercise.'

'No, I'm afraid of the ladies,' I replied.

'They *are* rather solid,' said Twenty-One reflectively, as a Post-Captain reversed on to his toes. 'My partner doesn't protect me as a gentleman should. He threw me at a Paymaster just now.'

How in the course of their work they had saved up enough energy for this diversion was beyond me. They danced, fair heel and toe, unsparingly a couple of hours, for the sheer, downright exercise of it. And they were by no means all youths in the game either. We dropped panting into the boats, and saw behind us the whole gay show fade, flicker, and twinkle out. The Flagship had returned to her ordinary business. To-morrow she would take us back to Portland on our speed trials.

* * * * * * *

NO. 2 WELSH COAL

'Isn't it scandalous? Isn't it perfectly damnable?' said an officer after we had got under way, pointing to the foul, greasy columns of smoke that poured from every funnel. 'Her Majesty's Channel Squadron, if you please, under steam, burning horse-dung.'

Truthfully, it was a sickening sight. We could have been seen thirty miles off, a curtain of cloud, spangled and speckled with bits of burning rubbish and lumps of muck. The First Lieutenant looked at the beach of clinkers piling up on his hammock-nettings and blessed the Principality of Wales. The

Chief Engineer merely said, 'You never know your luck in the Navy,' put on his most ancient kit, and was no more seen in the likeness of a Christian man. Fate had hit him hard, for, just as his fires were at their pink of perfection, a battleship chose to get up her anchor by hand, delaying us an hour, and blackening the well-cherished furnaces. 'No. 2 Welsh' (this must have been an Admiralty jest) needs a lot of coaxing.

CHIMNEY-SWEEPS ON THE HIGH SEAS

But we were not quite such an exhibition as the *Arrogant.* She showed like chemical works in full blast as we swept out of Bantry and headed south for the Scillies. Then up came the *Blake* (*see* Note VI.), a beautiful boat, giving easily to the swell that was lifting us already, and she dodged about left and right till we asked: 'What are you trying to do?' 'Trying to get out of your smoke,' said she, vomiting cascades of her own the while. Meantime the Fleet-rams were doing their best to blind and poison us, and the battleships sagged away to leeward looking like wet ricks ablaze.

It was not the ignominy of the thing—the mere dirt and filth—that annoyed one so much as the thought that there was no power in the State which owes its existence to the Navy whereby a decent supply of State-owned, State-dug coal could be assured to us. There had been a strike, and while masters and men were argle-bargling ashore Her Majesty's ships were masquerading in the guise of chimney-sweeps on the high seas.

The delay, the disorder, the cruel extra work on stokers, not to mention the engineers, who at all times are worked pitilessly, is in Peace no more than merely brutal. In war it would be dangerous.

FOUR HOURS AT FULL SPEED

As if that were not enough, the swell that the battleships logged as light (Heaven forgive them !) began to heave our starboard screw out of the water. We raced and we raced and we raced, dizzily, thunderously, paralytically, hysterically, vibrating all down one side. It was, of course, in our four hours of full speed that the sea most delighted to lift us up on one finger and watch us kick. From 6 to 10 p.m. one screw twizzled for the most part in the circumambient ether, and the Chief Engineer—with coal-dust and oil driven under his skin —volunteered the information that life in his department was gay. He would have left a white mark on the Assistant-Engineer, whose work lay in the stokehold among a gang of new Irish stokers. Never but once have I been in our engine-rooms ; and I do not go again till I can take with me their designer for four hours at full speed. The place is a little cramped and close, as you might say. A steel guard, designed to protect men from a certain toothed wheel round the shaft, shore through its bolts and sat down, much as a mud-guard sits down on a bicycle-wheel. But the wheel it sat on was also of steel ; spinning one hundred and ninety revolutions per minute. So there were fireworks, beautiful but embarrassing, of

incandescent steel sparks, surrounding the Assistant-Engineer as with an Aurora Borealis. They turned the hose on the display, and at last knocked the guard sideways, and it fell down somewhere under the shaft, so that they were at liberty to devote their attention to the starboard thrust-block, which was a trifle loose. Indeed, they had been trying to wedge the latter when the fireworks began—all up their backs.

The thing that consoled them was the thought that they had not slowed down one single turn.

THE NAVAL ENGINEER

'She's a giddy little thing,' said the Chief Engineer. 'Come down and have a look.'

I declined in suitable language. Some day, when I know more, I will write about engine-rooms and stokers' accommodation—the manners and customs of Naval Engineers and their artificers. They are an amazing breed, these quiet, rather pale men, in whose hands lie the strength and power of the ship.

'Just think what they've got to stand up to,' says Twenty-One, with the beautiful justice of youth. 'Of course, they are trained at Keyham and all that; but fancy doing your work with an eight-inch steam-pipe in the nape of your neck, an' a dynamo buzzin' up your back, an' the whole blessed shoot whizzin' round in the pit of your stomach! Then we jump about an' curse if they don't give us enough steam. I swear I think they're no end good men in the engine room!'

If you doubt this, descend by the slippery steel

ladders into the bluish copper-smelling haze of hurrying mechanism all crowded under the protective deck ; crawl along the greasy foot-plates, and stand with your back against the lengthwise bulkhead that separates the desperately whirling twin engines. Wait under the low-browed supporting-columns till the roar and the quiver has soaked into every nerve of you ; till your knees loosen and your heart begins to pump. Feel the floors lift below you to the jar and batter of the defrauded propeller as it draws out of its element. Try now to read the dizzying gauge-needles or find a meaning in the rumbled signals from the bridge. Creep into the stoke-hold—a boiler blistering either ear as you stoop— and taste what tinned air is like for a while. Face the intolerable white glare of the opened furnace doors ; get into a bunker and see how they pass coal along and up and down ; stand for five minutes with slice and 'devil' to such labour as the stoker endures for four hours.

HIS HOURLY RISK

The gentleman with the little velvet slip between the gold rings on his sleeve does his unnoticed work among these things. If anything goes wrong, if he overlooks a subordinate's error, he will not be wigged by the Admiral in God's open air. The bill will be presented to him down here, under the two-inch steel deck, by the Power he has failed to control. He will be peeled, flayed, blinded, or boiled. That is his hourly risk. His duty shifts him from one ship to another, to good smooth and accessible engines, to

vicious ones with a long record of deviltry, to lying engines that cannot do their work, to impostors with mysterious heart-breaking weaknesses, to new and untried gear fresh from the contractor's hands, to boilers that will not make steam, to reducing-valves that will not reduce, and auxiliary engines for distilling or lighting that often give more trouble than the main concern. He must shift his methods for, and project himself into the soul of, each; humouring, adjusting, bullying, coaxing, refraining, risking, and daring as need arises.

Behind him is his own honour and reputation; the honour of his ship and her imperious demands; for there is no excuse in the Navy. If he fails in any one particular he severs just one nerve of the ship's life. If he fails in all the ship dies—a prisoner to the set of the sea—a gift to the nearest enemy.

And, as I have seen him, he is infinitely patient, resourceful, and unhurried. However it might have been in the old days, when men clung obstinately to sticks and strings and cloths, the newer generation, bred to pole-masts, know that he is the king-pin of their system. Our Assistant-Engineer had been with the engines from the beginning, and one night he told me their story, utterly unconscious that there was anything out of the way in the noble little tale.

'NO END GOOD MEN'

It was his business so to arrange that no single demand from the bridge should go unfulfilled for more than five seconds. To that ideal he toiled unsparingly with his Chief—a black sweating demon in his

working hours, and a quiet student of professional papers in his scanty leisure.

'An' they come into the ward-room,' says Twenty-One, 'and you know they've been having a young hell of a time down below, but they never growl at us or get stuffy or anything. No end good men, I swear they are.'

'Thank you, Twenty-One,' I said. 'I'll let that stand for the whole Navy if you don't mind'

NOTES

NOTE I

PAINT AND GILDING

A ship who attempted to dress on her service allowance of paint would in three months be as disreputable as a battery or regiment which kept its mess or band on the strict army footing. Therefore, over and above anything that they may secure by strategy and foresight, the officers must dip into their own pockets to supply the many trifles (none of them cheap) which make for the smartness of a ship. This was forcibly brought home to me when I admired a shield and scroll-work at the bows of a large cruiser. 'Yes,' said a friend, 'it takes about fifty books (of gold-leaf) to gild that decently.'

'No. Seventy,' said another.

'How d'you know?'

'Well, somebody's got to gild it, and the Yard don't give you seventy books for nothing,' was the significant reply.

If there were any means of reckoning, the tax-payer would be somewhat astonished at the sums spent by Navy and Army for the privilege of serving the Queen. Both services have curious and crusted tales bearing on this head.

NOTE Ia.

As the comfort and efficiency of the ship, not to mention the Captain's peace of mind, depend on the First Lieutenant, the Captain as a rule takes good care to pick his own man. Here

are a few of the First Lieutenant's duties. He must act as a strainer between the Captain and the ship ; holding back the unessential, passing on the vital. That is to say, he must be a subtle and discriminating editor. He must make all his arrangements ; for the ordering and disposition of every soul aboard, through the next day, week or month ; with the cheerful foreknowledge that the bulk of them will be knocked into a naval cocked hat by the exigencies of the service. He must then retire into himself with a pack of printed cards, one for each man, and work out the whole puzzle afresh. At the same time he must not allow his own irritation to affect his dealings with the Wardroom, whose official head he is, and whose members are (*a*) his subordinates, and (*b*) gentlemen of leisure assembled of an evening for a quiet rubber. He must get the utmost out of them, not by the menace of his authority, because that means a smash-up sooner or later, but because of their genuine liking for him as an individual. The Wardroom is young, very male, and unable to avoid meeting itself every day and all day long. You will concede that a certain amount of tact may be necessary in handling it ? He must, further, see with those eyes which he is authorised to wear at the back of his head, that no warrant or petty officer, no ship's corporal, or master-at-arms is abusing authority to spite some man or boy. He must still further see that no official, yielding to a natural desire for popularity, is quietly letting down the discipline of the lower-deck. He must know the Captain's mind seventeen and two-thirds seconds before the Captain opens his mouth, because he will need that time to think out arrangements to meet the order. He must be the soul of rectitude and honour, but he must grasp the inwardness and frustrate the outwardness of every trick and trap sprung on him twenty times a day. In the Captain's absence he is the visitors' host and chaperone, and as visitors in harbour may range from Royalty to ragamuffins, his manners must be in the widest sense of the word, adaptable. Finally, at all crises, where the "blue" goes there must he lead : leaping the larger abyss ; standing nearer to the danger ; walking the more slippery foothold, passively enduring longer the exposure ; and through it all he must keep the cool eye and balanced head of authority.

And the public is surprised when a naval officer proves that he is a diplomat !

NOTE II

COXSWAINS AND GALLEYS

The Captain's coxswain is always an important person. As a rule the Captain has known him for a long time, often for ten or fifteen years, and the man follows his superior's fortunes with unswerving loyalty, till he blossoms into the dignity of coxswain of the Admiral's barge, beside whom dukes are not even three a penny. He is, by virtue of his office, the smartest man in the ship, and by training becomes a clean-shaved miracle of tact and discretion. Each boat's crew have a life of their own, a little world, into which they enter, picking up where they left off, so soon as cutter or whaler leaves the ship's side; but I fancy the *esprit de corps* is most strongly developed in the Captain's galley. On one occasion we had been out all day fishing, and the wind forced us to row the long seven miles back to the fleet, against the tide, round rocky points fringed with conflicting currents. It was a lumpy and disheartening sea, leaden grey in the twilight except where the shoals cast up wisps and smudges of half-phosphorescent white—a three hours' journey, enlivened by the incessant dry roar and rattle of the surf around Roancarrig and the answering growl of the waves on the mainland. I watched the untiring machine digging out over the steep-pitched cross-waters; eight pair of shoulders rising and falling against the first stars and the smoke of spray about the bows; till every muscle in me ached out of sympathy. Thrice they were invited to rest themselves, for they had been ten hours at work, and there was six hundred pounds' dead weight of fish in the boat; and thrice they replied: 'Oh, we can jog on like this, sir.' So they jogged with never a quiver or a falter through all the tumble, and when we reached still water, under the lee of the ships, they spurted up the avenue as though returning from a call on the flagship half a mile away. I demanded of the coxswain how this thing was done.

'Oh, you get used to it,' said he. 'Besides, that wasn't anything particular. Sometimes you have the boat half full of water, jumping out and coming down like a hammer. That's the time you learn to row.'

'I see. Why didn't some of you miss your stroke in that tumble coming round the point when we took the water over the bows?'

'Well,'—still the same smile—'if you did that—why, you wouldn't be in the galley. There's all the other boats to practise *that* in. You've never seen her properly under sail, have you?'

For sheer luxury of motion, commend me to a galley which has just "taken on" a brother captain's craft for a small walk down the bay. The rig is simplicity itself: there is a man to every rope that vitally communicates with anything: and the most highly trained shifting-ballast in the world, spread low between the thwarts, obeys the wave of the hand.

NOTE III

THE ART OF GUNNERY

Many men will tell you that our ships are under-gunned. So they are—on paper: but on paper a gun merely represents a tube sticking out of the side. One does not see the little group of from three to nine men who work it in action; the ammunition hoist that feeds it; or the pile of live shell and cartridge that would lie beside it. These things take up space, and the more space you supply, the less will the gun be disconcerted by its own or a neighbour's disaster. Our people do not like to work in crowds. They prefer, as we do ashore, to manage their own little shows alone. The effect of wounded men kicking and hiccoughing in a crowded secondary battery is bad for cool aiming; besides which, idlers, cooks and servants might be jostling the workers in their efforts to get the wounded below. On an open deck, with fair intervals between the guns, the wounded can be moved out of the way at once; and if the gun itself, by any chance, be dismounted, there is a margin of safety for its inboard collapse, and room for a working-party to take charge of it. I am speaking now of light armaments behind shields. The knowledge that one lucky shot might wreck two or three guns together does not make for happiness. This is why our guns are comparatively

few in number, but exceedingly handy to work. A ship knows, of course, exactly where the crowd would of necessity be gathered in any craft opposed to her. Two or three shots in a nest of crowded guns, open ammunition-hoists, and piles of 'ready' cartridges, will do more moral and intellectual damage than the effacement of one or two guns in a line strung evenly from bow to stern.

NOTE IV

OMDURMAN

You must understand here that the Flagship was not only our central authority, but Reuter's Agency as well; and that between orders for drills were sandwiched little pieces of news from the world ashore. One peaceful morning the Yeoman of Signals came to the captain's cabin at the regulation pace, but with heightened colour and an eye something brighter than usual. 'Signal from the flagship, sir,' said he, reading off the slate. 'Omdurman fallen: killed so many, and wounded so many.' 'Thank you,' said the captain. 'Tell the men.' On this, I went forward to see how the news would be received. We were busy painting some deck-houses, and the work continued to an accompaniment of subdued voices—the hushed tones of men under the eye of authority. Word was passed to the lower deck and the stokehold: and the hum of talk rose, perhaps, half a note. I halted by the painters. Said one, dipping deep in the white lead: 'Um, ah! This ought to make the French sickish. Almost 'ear 'em coughin', can't you?' Said another, reaching out for the broadest and slabbiest brush: 'I say, Alf, lend us that Khartoum brush o' yours.' After a long pause, stepping back to catch the effect of a peculiarly juicy stroke—head a little aside and one eye shut: 'Well, we've waited about long enough, 'aven't we?' Bosun's mate with a fine mixture of official severity and human tolerance: 'What *are* you cacklin' for over there! Carry on quiet, can't you?' And that was how we took the news of the little skirmish called Omdurman.

NOTE V

BOAT-RACING

Our whaler would go out between lights under pretence of practising, but really for the purpose of insulting other whalers whom she had beaten in inter-ship contests. Boat-racing is to the mariner what horse-racing is to the landsman. The way of it is simple. When your racing crew is in proper condition, you row under the bows of the ship you wish to challenge and throw up an oar. If you are very confident, or have a long string of victories to your credit, you borrow a cock from the hen-coops and make him crow. Then the match arranges itself. A friendly launch tows both of you a couple of miles down the bay, and back you come, digging out for the dear life, to be welcomed by hoarse subdued roars from the crowded foc'sles of the battleships. This deep booming surge of voices is most moving to hear. Some day a waiting fleet will thus cheer a bruised and battered sister staggering in with a prize at her tail —a plugged and splintered wreck of an iron box, her planking brown with what has dried there, and the bright water cascading down her sides. I saw the setting of such a picture one blood-red evening when the hulls of the fleet showed black on olive-green water, and the yellow of the masts turned raw-meat colours in the last light. A couple of racing cutters spun down the fairway, and long after they had disappeared we could hear far-off ships applauding them. It was too dark to catch more than a movement of masses by the bows, and it seemed as though the ships themselves were triumphing all together.

NOTE VI

THE BEAUTY OF BATTLESHIPS

Do not believe what people tell you of the ugliness of steam, nor join those who lament the old sailing days. There is one beauty of the sun and another of the moon, and we must be thankful for both. A modern man-of-war photographed in

severe profile is not engaging; but you should see her with the life hot in her, head-on across a heavy swell. The ram-bow draws upward and outward in a stately sweep. There is no ruck of figure-head, bow-timbers or bowsprit-fittings to distract the eye from its outline or the beautiful curves that mark its melting into the full bosom of the ship. It hangs dripping an instant, then, quietly and cleanly as a tempered knife, slices into the hollow of the swell, down and down till the surprised sea spits off in foam about the hawse-holes. As the ship rolls in her descent you can watch curve after new curve revealed, humouring and coaxing the water. When she recovers her step, the long sucking hollow of her own wave discloses just enough of her shape to make you wish to see more. In harbour, the still waterline, hard as the collar of a tailor-made jacket, hides that vision; but when she dances the Big Sea Dance, she is as different from her Portsmouth shilling photograph as is a matron in a macintosh from the same lady at a ball. Swaying a little in her gait, drunk with sheer delight of movement, perfectly apt for the work in hand, and in every line of her rejoicing that she is doing it, she shows, to these eyes at least, a miracle of grace and beauty. Her sides are smooth as a water-worn pebble, curved and moulded as the sea loves to have them. Where the box-sponsioned, overhanging, treble-turreted ships of some other navies hammer and batter into an element they do not understand, she, clean, cool, and sweet, uses it to her own advantage. The days are over for us when men piled baronial keeps, flat-irons, candlesticks, and Doré towers on floating platforms. The New Navy offers to the sea precisely as much to take hold of as the trim level-headed woman with generations of inherited experience offers to society. It is the provincial, aggressive, uncompromising, angular, full of excellently unpractical ideas, who is hurt, and jarred, and rasped in that whirl. In other words, she is not a good sea-boat and cannot work her guns in all weathers.

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